

11 Keeping the Flame Alive

Short-term missions for the long haul. That's the theme of The Next Mile. And it should be the mantra of all STM leaders. But the truth is few have taken on STM with the intentionality and commitment necessary to make short-term missions anything more than just short-term. It has not been the intention to ignore follow-through. I'm quite certain everyone hopes their STM will have long-term results. But long-term impact does not happen by accident.

Dr. Kurt Ver Beek, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has been studying the impact of short-term missions. In an interview during his research, Kurt said this:

"I'm beginning to see that short-term missions are like the rest of life. We go to a conference or a summer camp and leave excited to pray every day, exercise four times a week, and reorganize our closets. But then we get home to find we are behind at work, the kids have soccer practice, and we have to pay off the credit card. Our new-found motivation tapers off. Participants in short-term missions have a similar experience. Immediately after returning from a trip, participants intend to make changes in their life, but usually fall back into old routines... Let's just say that if STM is like the rest of life, we have to figure out what transforms good intentions into real change in other areas of life. That should give us insight into how short-term missions can make a long-term impact."

Yes! That's it! Figure out what "transforms good intentions into real change." In other words, figure out how to keep the flame alive. No

**FIGURE OUT WHAT
"TRANSFORMS GOOD
INTENTIONS INTO
REAL CHANGE."**

NOTES

matter what tools or strategies we can come up with, it is going to take work and will mean making sacrifices. That is the privilege and price of leadership. “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:28–29).

Who Is Responsible for Follow-through Anyway?

During research for The Next Mile, it was determined that there are five main categories of people who should be involved in the follow-through process for short-termers. They are listed in order.

The Local Church. Fellow team members, team leaders, church leadership, the missions committee, the congregation, and mentors can all play a role in the follow-through process for the people from your church who served in short-term missions.

The Short-Termer. There is a natural expectation that a short-termer should take some initiative. This is typically proportionate to the support and encouragement of the local church. The more the church is behind the efforts of the STMer, the more the STMer is motivated to seek out ways to keep the flame alive.

The Sending Entity (organization). If you used an organization to help organize your STM, then it is believed they should take some interest in the STMer they served. This is typically only possible if the local church and/or team members will keep information flowing to the sending entity.

The Receiving/Sending Mission. This is the mission or agency by which the missionary is endorsed. Follow-through by the receiving/sending mission is typically directed at those who are interested in pursuing longer-term ministry.

The Host Receiver. Realistically, missionaries will only make an effort to build a relationship with those who are interested in returning for continued service or long-term ministry.

Do you see how you are connected to the people in each of these categories? You are the liaison to each one, and that makes you a very strategic link for follow-through.

NOTES

Suggestions for Keeping the Flame Alive

What's in the Goer Guide

The Leader Guide, Goer Guide, Resource CD, and website have ideas, resources, and links to help you with follow-through. But remember—there is no silver bullet. The second part of Colossians 1:28–29 says, “To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.” Why would you labor and struggle? So that you can fulfill the first part of the passage: that you “may present everyone perfect in Christ.” That is your high calling as team leader.

The Bible says, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14–16). The Goer Guide includes information on how to continue to live a life that is a light to the world:

- **L**ive differently
- **I**nvest in the mission field
- **G**uard your mind
- **H**ide God's Word in your heart
- **T**ake risks

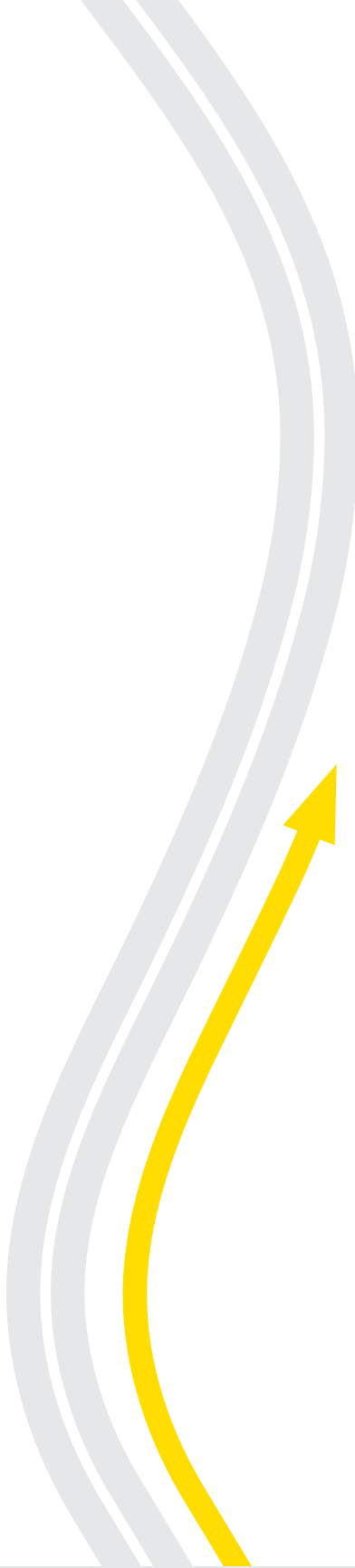
The Goer Guide also includes information and suggestions for the following:

- Now What?
- Outreach and Evangelism
- Finding Ministry in the Church, Community, and World
- Whatever, Whenever, Wherever. On the Resource CD, you will find a master to print cards for Whatever, Whenever, Wherever for use at a post-field team meeting.
- Adopt an Unreached People
- Adopt a Bible-less People

As your church is growing in missions awareness, consider leading your church to partner with a field, a missionary, or another church. The following are testimonies of the blessings and strengths of partnering for the long haul.



NOTES



Benefits of Missions Partnerships – The Local Church Perspective

Since 1998 our church has been involved in a partnership with churches in Japan. The vision was to work with American missionaries to help plant churches. At a time when we were launching a capital campaign to build a new building, a commitment was made to dedicate 25 percent of all funds raised to missions partnerships, and especially to Japan. These funds have been used to send over 40 of our members to Japan on assignments from one week to one year. In addition, we have been able to provide some strategic funding to enable two Japanese church plants to accelerate their progress toward calling Japanese pastors. The benefits to our Japanese partners are clear, but the benefits to our own congregation have been just as great. Consider these three:

A Sharper Focus

Our partnership in Japan has helped sharpen the focus of our global outreach efforts. We still support and work with missionaries in many parts of the world, but everyone in the church knows that we have a special commitment to Japan. Many of us have been involved first-hand. We all have given and prayed. The world is a big place. Given the billions who need to know about Christ, a church can easily despair that it can't make any real difference. Our church family has a sense that it is making a significant difference in the Tama and Izumi communities of greater Tokyo. One church can't do everything, but a partnership like ours helps a church know it is doing something.

A Sense of Usefulness

The nature of our partnership is such that it has required a wide range of expertise. Church members who never thought God could use them in a missionary context have been amazed at what a significant contribution they have made in Japan. One homemaker was recently surprised at how many Japanese women showed up to learn how to make chocolate chip cookies. As she demonstrated cookie-making, she shared her testimony. The Japanese churches benefited from having new contacts which led to spiritual conversations. Our homemaker came away with a new appreciation of the way her skills could be used to reach Japanese people for Christ.

Significant Friendships

Members of our church have stayed in Japanese homes and have maintained contact with their hosts. In fact, last fall two

NOTES

weddings at Grace Point were attended by guests from Japan. On two occasions, the Japanese churches brought groups to Newtown. Japanese believers and their unbelieving friends were hosted by members of Grace Point. One Japanese woman put her faith in Christ at the conclusion of her stateside trip. Through these interactions, cross-cultural friendships have formed.

I could list many other benefits of our partnership in Japan. Suffice it to say, that I can no longer imagine doing missions in the local church without the benefit of long-term partnerships.

Dave Ridder, Senior Pastor, Grace Point, Newtown, Pennsylvania


Partnering for the Long Haul?

I confess that the designation “short-term missions” has always struck a cord of discomfort with me. It seems to be an oxymoron. However, I do not discredit what has been a very effective, high-impact movement. We can say unequivocally that, “Missions is not short-term.” It takes long-term commitment and effort and is the result of a long-term burden. Preaching the gospel, making disciples, and teaching men to obey what Jesus commanded is our mission, and there is nothing short-term about it. To assure that a short-term ministry doesn’t bear short-term fruit or become a short-term phenomenon, I recommend it be carried out as part of a long-term partnership between local churches at home and overseas, developed under the guidance of a long-term mission’s strategy.

I recently returned from Venezuela and Brazil where I assisted two North American churches in partnering ministries in those countries. One rewarding part of this trip was to see the leaders of these churches sit down after their time of ministry, not only to celebrate what they had done together, but to collaborate on what would be their “next step” together. Their partnership encouraged them to think long-term. They were not interested in “make work” projects but in strategic ministries that would see their churches grow and expand their kingdom impact. The very nature of the work is changed when carried out under the commitment of partnerships.

One of these pastors sent me his ministry report. Tell me if this doesn’t resonate with your vision to make long-term impact for the kingdom.

NOTES



Pastor Sergio Pinto asked his congregation to make a list of all those they wanted to reach for Christ ... They began to pray six months ahead of our time with them and had a sign-up sheet to pray round the clock during the two weeks prior to our arrival. The evidence of this prayer support was very real. Many profound spiritual breakthroughs were experienced.

I asked those who returned home with me from Brazil to describe the emotions they experienced on this trip. They said, "Thank you for helping us learn so much more about faith, obedience, and joy!" The happy reality of serving Christ is that his joy is not only experienced by those who believe the gospel, it is also the "wages" of those who bring the gospel message (Luke 10:17; Psalm 126:4-5).

I have the evangelism prayer list of those Brazilian churches. I have requested a list of all who responded to the gospel. Pastor Sergio will also e-mail us pictures of all who are eventually baptized over the next months.

As Pastor Sergio and I sat in his office reflecting on the amazing spiritual victories we had just experienced, he showed me a map on his wall. His penetrating question was, "How many more churches will you help us plant all the way to Rio de Janeiro?" Good question!

Let me encourage you as you set out on a short-term ministry ... think Partnerships. It will expand your vision as never before and will create an environment where ministry will be measured by its long-term impact for the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Joel Van Hoogen, Church Partnership Evangelism

| Keeping the Team a Team

Having a team comprised of members from the same church or region is a real benefit. Preparing, training, praying, and other critical building blocks can be done together. The benefits flow into the on-field ministry as well as the post-field follow-through. You can capitalize on the fact that there are many who can help tell the story, spread the vision, and keep the flame alive.

NOTES

The Richness of Team Experience

There's an emphasis on debriefing today—reviewing the events of a short-term mission experience and integrating them into life back home. But the focus is often on individuals and individual experiences. Those who go on a short-term mission as a team will gain a lot by focusing on the team experience as well.

A short-term mission team is a microcosm of the body of Christ and a valuable context for understanding the nature of Christian community. It provides a richness of experience that—when tapped through debriefing—can challenge individual members to reach beyond their own personal perspectives.

The best teams have taken time to become authentic, reconciling communities. They've spent time developing love and mutual respect within the team. They've given place to their own ethnic, cultural, and individual differences, and allowed the Lord to draw them together as a powerful witness in his world.

Before you return home, there needs to be time for reflection and dialogue. Ask questions like the following and apply the answers to your own situation:

What was our team purpose? Team members may still have differing ideas on this.

How did our team function? A healthy team will have made use of the diverse gifts of its members. It also will have been able to deal with conflict.

What did we learn about team ministry? A team that has had a variety of experiences in a culture can piece together a mosaic of issues.

How did God show himself to us?

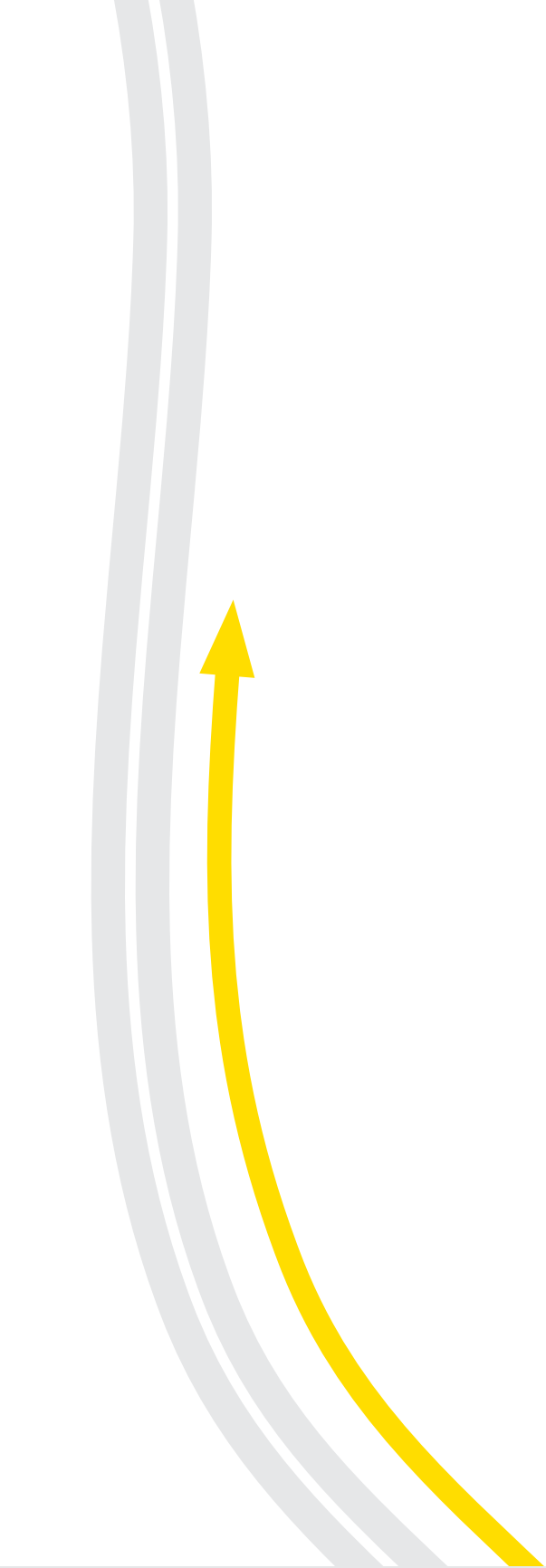
What impact did the culture have on our team? A healthy team learns to enjoy a culture and adjusts to changes in individual world views by affirming God's truth in Scripture.

What did we learn about God?

What have we learned from team life? Divide this question into aspects that were easy and ones that were hard. Both can be tools for learning and personal growth.



NOTES



What relationships in the team need reconciliation? Allow time for individuals to meet and talk over difficulties—praying them through to reconciliation.

What have we enjoyed most about the team and about each other?

What do we need from the team as we make the transition back home? Be realistic and clear about needs and about the commitments you make to one another.

Close the session by asking each person to make a “next step” commitment—some way to allow the short-term experience to impact the future. Then get together again several weeks after you return home. For teams whose members don’t live close to each other, find ways to do this by phone and through e-mail. Continue to reflect on the issues raised in your last debriefing on the field. Spend time talking through difficulties people are having with re-entry back home. Report on progress in your “next step” commitments. And pray for the people in the host culture you left behind.

As a team embarks upon a life-changing mission, individuals can fill their “suitcases” with gifts of insight from their teammates. Upon returning home, they will find themselves unpacking more than just curios. They will discover spiritual treasures that build character and glorify the Creator.

Linda Olson, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

NOTES